

The Truth about the **Barcelona Events**

By LAMBDA

Introduction by

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131 West 33 St.,
New York, N. Y.

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Introduction

THE proletariat of Barcelona is the backbone of the Spanish Revolution. It was they who saved Spain from fascism in July of last year. While the Republican Government vacillated and temporized for three days (July 17, 18, 19), refused to dissolve the army in rebellion, refused to call upon the soldiers to disobey their officers, refused to arm the proletariat, and tried to negotiate an "honorable" surrender to the fascist rebellion, it was the Barcelona proletariat, armed only with pistols, rifles taken from sporting goods stores, and stones and clubs and following the lead of syndicalists, anarchists and POUMists, who stormed the Barcelona barracks. Thereby they changed the history of Spain, perhaps the history of our times.

The heroic "storming of the heavens" by the Barcelona workers on July 19, inspired the Madrid proletariat to take the Montaña Barracks on July 20. The entire army had revolted but the working class began to build a new workers' army. The Republican, People's Front Government had betrayed them, but they went into battle on their own account. But now, reformism in Madrid and anarcho-syndicalism in Barcelona prevented them from consolidating their victory by the taking over of power. The syndicalists, burdened by the weight of anarchist prejudices, did not know how to take power. The Communist Party, blinded by the anti-

communist theory of the People's Front, opposed the retention of power, insisted upon the rehabilitation of the discredited, vacillating, treacherous bourgeois republicans, fought against the socialization of industry (even capitalist nations take over industry for war purposes), opposed the freeing of the Moors which would have smashed Franco at the start, opposed the nationalization of the land which would have destroyed the social roots of fascism, insisted on the retention of unreliable bourgeois generals, who later betrayed strongholds like Malaga, opposed the development of a genuine workers' army, insisted upon the preservation of capitalism with its fascist sympathies ("The Fifth Column"), and, by the inevitable logic of their errors, ended up by assuming an armed offensive against the revolutionary workers and their organizations on May 3, 1937.

Step by step bourgeois reaction has lifted its head again. It supports and swells the ranks of the official Communist Party, and hides behind it as once German capitalism hid behind Scheidemann and Noske. It enjoys secret support from France and England against its own working class. It counts on conservative elements within the Spanish Socialist Party. Its spokesmen make dark and mysterious hints about a possible truce or compromise. Its latest government, the Negrin Cabinet, freed at last of the U.G.T. and C.N.T., the two powerful trade union centers, proposes openly the following program:

"1. Restoring freedom of worship in all churches . . .

"2. Return all business to its owners with the

exception of certain large industries important for war purposes."

It closes the headquarters of the revolutionary party, the POUM, suppresses POUM, Anarchist and Syndicalist papers, but would reopen the Churches, centers of counter-revolutionary propaganda and even fortified machine gun nests of reaction!

Without even waiting for the end of the war, so bitter is its enmity to socialism, it would dislodge the workers organizations from industry, and disorganize such war necessities as the food industry by returning it to private hands!

With Bilbao in danger it does not hesitate to organize shock troops for civil war (the Carabineros) and unleash attacks upon the workers organizations behind the lines! It is more afraid of its own proletariat in arms than it is of its former instruments of power, the fascist generals! Does it need an armed proletariat in order to be saved from fascism? Then it would rather not be saved from fascism! It knows what the Communist Party has forgotten: that fascism and bourgeois democracy are but two forms of capitalism, but the proletariat in arms, the proletariat in power, spells the end of capitalism. Therefore it runs the risk of losing the war by attempting to disarm the proletariat of Barcelona that saved Spain from fascism. It drives Largo Caballero out of office as too responsive to the will of the trade unions. It tries to outlaw the revolutionary party of the proletariat, the POUM. It drives the trade unions out of the Government. It seeks to crush all obstacles in the way of dark compromise and open reaction.

With heads bowed in shame we are forced to recognize that the Communist Party of Spain carried on the propaganda campaign paving the way for reaction. It branded the POUM as Trotskyite though Trotsky attacks the POUM and the POUM Trotsky, and though the POUM has expelled its handful of Trotskyites. Ten thousand POUMists are fighting at the front out of a party of 50,000, but the POUMists are "agents of Franco." And the heroic workers of Barcelona who saved Spain from Franco, when they resist disarmament, are also "agents of Franco." Things have come to such a pass that the writings of a Gannes, a Marion or a Koltzev outdo those of bourgeois journalists in pen prostitution and hatred and slander of the leaders of the Spanish proletarian revolution.

The revolutionary workers of America, unable to trust the official Communist, or bourgeois press, have waited anxiously for reliable news on the May Days in Barcelona. The present report by Comrade Lambda, first published in the columns of the *Workers Age*, is the news we have been waiting for. It is more than reporting; it is a masterpiece of Marxist historical analysis. Despite its brevity, despite the problems of censorship, distance and distortion of news, Lambda has succeeded in establishing in a single dispatch, the class forces involved, the role of parties and organizations and the underlying historic import of the May struggles in Catalonia. He has redeemed the honor of Marxist journalism besmirched by official communist newspapers, and has renewed the great tradition set by Marx and Engels in the re-

porting of the French and German revolutions of 1848. The *Workers Age* is proud of the fact that this modern classic first appeared within its pages, proud also of being a reliable source of information on the most important events taking place in the world today, the events that, taken together, comprise the Proletarian Revolution in Spain.

—BERTRAM D. WOLFE

The Truth About the Barcelona Events

By LAMBDA

May 19, 1937.

I. ABOUT THE MAY STRUGGLES IN CATALONIA

WHAT was behind the fighting which took place in Barcelona and the rest of Catalonia during the first week of May, is becoming constantly clearer in the light of additional reports and the actions of the various parties and organizations involved. The most important facts may be summarized in a few paragraphs.

The fighting began on Monday, May 3, with the attempt of the PSUC¹ to occupy the telephone exchange building in Barcelona, until then under the control of the CNT.² This action was based on a far-reaching and carefully constructed plan. The telephone exchange buildings at Lerida, Gerona, Taragona, etc., were supposed to be simultaneously occupied and taken over. That all this was of the nature of provocation and conspiracy

1 PSUC—United Socialist Party of Catalonia, the Comintern party of that country.

2 CNT—National Confederation of Labor, the anarcho-syndicalist trade union federation.

FAI—Iberian Anarchist Federation.

becomes perfectly obvious when it is remembered that the plan of the Catalonian government had been kept a dead secret—that is to say, Companys probably knew all about it but the plan was most assuredly kept secret from the CNT-FAI members of the government. Those who instigated the whole affair and then took action were the PSUC and the Communist Party of Spain and upon them falls the entire responsibility.

The revolutionary workers of Barcelona and the rest of Catalonia answered *spontaneously* with a general strike, erecting barricades and disarming the government troops. By Wednesday, the CNT-FAI were the unquestioned masters of the situation in Barcelona as well as the rest of Catalonia. A change in the situation occurred, however, because the leadership of the CNT and the FAI did not dare to carry through their victory by taking power into their hands. On Wednesday, the CNT and the FAI fell in with a strategic manouver of the PSUC and the Esquerra,³ intended as a ruse to assure the latter the upper hand. The CNT and the FAI ordered their members to cease armed struggle and bade them to return to work. Immediately thereafter, however, the well-armed formations of the PSUC renewed their attack. From Valencia, 5,000 Assault Guards as well as several warships were sent to Barcelona. With their aid, the disarming of the revolutionary workers was carried out, a feat which could never have been accomplished in an open fight. Countless arrests and assassinations of anarchists, syndicalists

3 Esquerra—a bourgeois liberal party of Catalonia.

and POUMists⁴ were carried out at once. The editorial staff of "*La Batalla*," central organ of the POUM, was arrested. "*La Batalla*" itself was put under strictest preliminary censorship. The PSUC and the CP of Spain opened a fiendish drive to outlaw and dissolve the POUM. The Comintern press helped out very loudly.

Statements issued by Companys, President of Catalonia, reveal the fact that his appeals for assistance fell on deaf ears in Valencia until he ceded the Valencia government the right to take over all police functions as well as the high command of the Catalan troops at the front—a piece of extortion aimed at the extinction of Catalan autonomy. The leadership of the CNT-FAI reports that it sent a number of trustworthy persons to the CNT batallions on the Aragon front to persuade the soldiers not to leave the front for the purpose of intervening in the fighting at Barcelona. These emissaries prevailed and the soldiers remained at the front.

On Wednesday and Thursday, May 5 and 6, a number of French and English warships appeared in the port of Barcelona in support of the counter-revolutionary provocation; evidently they had been summoned by Companys and Valencia. With this, the international connections of the counter-revolutionary coup became clearly established.

⁴ POUM—Workers Party of Marxist Unity, the independent communist party of Catalonia and Spain, which, unlike the official communist party, is following a really communist policy in the Spanish civil war.

II. THE MANIFESTO ISSUED BY THE CNT, THE FAI AND THE LIBERTARIAN YOUTH OF CATALONIA

During the May events, there became clearly apparent for the first time the split between the masses of the anarcho-syndicalist workers who, weapon in hand, were defending their revolutionary gains, and certain leaders of the CNT and FAI, above all, the CNT cabinet ministers in the Valencia government and the Generalidad. These individuals proved themselves partly corrupt with opportunism and partly lacking in clarity of aim and determination.

After the compromise manouever had brought defeat to the revolutionary workers, there followed a violent reaction among the anarcho-syndicalist workers. This reaction is reflected in the manifesto of the leadership of the CNT, the FAI and the Libertarian Youth of Catalonia, published in the May 12 issue of the "*Solidaridad Obrera*."

This manifesto openly describes the provocation during the first days in May as "a conspiracy." This conspiracy—that is, the attack upon the telephone exchange building—produced a spontaneous protest on the part of workers. The attack upon the telephone exchange building was personally led by the PSUC official, Salas, who was under written orders from Aiguade, orders of which the Council of the Generalidad had no knowledge whatsoever. This coup was to be the starting point of a "far-reaching plan of action with unqualified aims."

The proclamation points out that this action had been prepared carefully over a long period of

time and that part of these preparations had been to demoralize the hinterland and to undermine confidence in the committees and the leadership of the CNT. The proclamation goes on to point out the numerous assassinations of CNT members by the PSUC and the police troops—12 in San Andres, 15 in Taragona, the assassination of the Italian anarchist Berneri, etc. Another aim of the provocation was to bring about foreign intervention, "the advance-troops of which were represented by the six French and English war vessels that appeared on Wednesday and Thursday of the past week in the port of Barcelona." The proclamation declares that, in view of the numerous arrests and individual assassinations perpetrated by their enemies, the CNT and the FAI would find a way for proper retribution, should such practices not cease at once.

The proclamation appeals to the members of the UGT⁵ in the following words:

"Remember that your place is on the side of your class comrades and not in alliance with the bourgeoisie, either big or little, which is defending its own interests and is fighting with every means and weapon available to throttle the Spanish revolution. . . . Stand fast against all provocations and against all those perpetrating such provocations! Work together with us in our common task of exposing the guilty ones in this, the biggest crime in history. Let us unite against the com-

mon enemy, the enemy within and without, the enemy at the front and at home, the enemy who is plotting against us in every hole and corner of Spanish politics and in every dark corridor of the government offices of Europe. . . . Long live the revolutionary alliance of the proletariat! Down with the counter-revolution! Long live the unity of the CNT and the UGT, the only safeguard for victory in the war and in the revolution!"

The slogan of the revolutionary alliance of the proletariat is equivalent to the slogan issued by the POUM for a revolutionary workers front. The proclamation of the CNT reveals that the anarcho-syndicalist workers have begun to learn the lesson of the recent events and that they are determined to continue the fight for the revolution.

III. THE POSITION OF THE POUM ON THE MAY BATTLES

The attitude of the POUM on the May battles is formulated in the resolution adopted by the Enlarged Central Committee of the party after the May events, published on May 13 in "*La Batalla*."

"1. The unceasing provocations of the counter-revolution, embodied in the reformist parties of the PSUC and the petty bourgeoisie—provocations aimed at liquidating in the spheres of economy, war and the public order, the revolutionary gains won by the workers, weapon in hand, on July 19, provocations which reached their climax on May 3 with the

⁵ UGT—General Union of Workers, the trade union federation in which socialists and communists are active.

attempt to storm the telephone exchange building—these provocations produced the armed protest of the proletariat.

"2. The political position of the POUM could be none other than active solidarity with the workers who spontaneously declared a general strike, erected barricades in the streets of Barcelona and took it upon themselves to defend with exemplary heroism the endangered conquests of the revolution.

"3. Since the workers fighting in the streets lacked concrete aims as well as responsible leadership, the POUM had no other alternative but to organize a strategic retreat by convincing the working class to avoid all desperate action that might have resulted in a putsch, inevitably leading to the complete extermination of the most advanced sections of the proletariat.

"4. The experience of the May struggles has clearly shown that the only solution lies in the seizure of power by the working class and that it is therefore absolutely necessary for the revolutionary activity of the working masses to be coordinated thru the formation of a revolutionary workers front uniting all organizations ready to fight for the complete annihilation of fascism. This can be accomplished only thru military victory at the front and the victory of the revolution at home.

"The Central Committee of the POUM is of the opinion that the policy pursued by the party has been completely justified;

it fully endorses the line of the Executive Committee, convinced that the party has defended the interests of the revolution and of the broad working masses."

IV. THE REORGANIZATION OF THE VALENCIA GOVERNMENT

The reorganization of the Valencia government was instigated by the official Communist Party, whose ministers resigned with the demand that the measures against the revolutionary workers of Catalonia be intensified and carried thru to the end, as well as by the French and English governments which made their voice heard in the very cabinet thru the Minister of Foreign Affairs, Alvarez del Vayo.

The main objectives of this move were the elimination of Caballero and thus of the left socialists from the Cabinet, the exclusion of the CNT-FAI, the strengthening of bourgeois republican influence, the emancipation of the government from the control of working class organizations, the centralization of military power in a single hand, and the liquidation of the revolutionary achievements of the July days in Catalonia and the rest of Spain. The real nature of this move is best illustrated by a number of facts.

In its issue of May 11, the paper "*Adelante*," the organ of the UGT and of Largo Caballero personally, describes the demands raised by the CP of Spain and the Comintern in the following terms:

"If the Caballero government were to apply the measures of suppression to

which the Spanish section of the Communist International is trying to incite it, then it would come close to a government of Gil Robles or Lerroux; it would destroy the unity of the working class and expose us to the danger of losing the war and shipwrecking the revolution. . . . A government composed in its majority of people from the labor movement cannot make use of methods that are reserved for reactionary and fascist-like governments."

The article expressly rejects responsibility for the events in Catalonia and throws the responsibility upon those who provoked the situation.

The role that the French and English governments played in the Catalonian events and the aims pursued by these governments in the situation and in the reorganization of the Valencia government, are exposed with welcome clarity in a semi-official editorial in the "*Temps*" of May 17. This article was written after the governmental crisis in Barcelona had broken out into the open but before it had been solved; it was, therefore, written with a view to influencing the solution of the crisis in the direction desired by the People's Front government of France. The editorial goes on to say:

"The struggle therefore proceeds in Valencia, as it went on in Barcelona, between the communist influence, allied with the socialists and republicans, and the anarcho-syndicalists, whom it is a question of destroying and removing from the government. . . . Either Mr. Largo Caballero will simply rebuild his cabinet on the same

foundations, that is, from the representatives of all of the People's Front parties and the socialist and anarcho-syndicalist labor organizations or he will attempt to free the republican government from the control of the extremists by building up a combination basing itself entirely on the political parties of the People's Front. If this latter formula is applied, it will signify an important development; in fact, it will constitute a decisive reaction against the so-called proletarian socialist revolution. The anarchists and the syndicalists have never hidden the fact that the defense of the republican regime and the democratic order is their least concern and that what they are above all trying to accomplish on the basis of the present civil war is the complete social revolution for the sole benefit of the proletariat. The republican government of Valencia has reached the point where it must decide. It can no longer remain in the state of ambiguity in which it has hitherto lived. It must choose between democracy and proletarian dictatorship, between order and anarchy."

Corresponding to these directives of the French and English bourgeoisie, directives supported by the Spanish section of the Communist International, the republican parties and the right wing of the Social-Democracy, a reorganization in the Valencia government has taken place. Caballero has been ousted. In the government the right wing only of Social-Democracy is represented through Premier Negrin, the new War Minister Prieto and the Minister of the Interior. The Foreign Ministry

was handed over to the left republican, Giral, the chairman of the left republican party, the man who was premier until the fall of Irun and who was removed from the government precisely because of the fall of Irun. Now this political corpse has been resurrected. . . .

The CNT and the FAI have had their representatives ousted from the government, after they were offered half of their previous representation. The government now consists of three socialists, two official communists and four of the bourgeois parties. In reality, this government is dominated by bourgeois republican influence since the right wing socialists, such as Prieto, must be regarded as bourgeois republicans. The UGT is officially not represented in the new government.

The new government was promptly hailed with great joy by the official press of England and France. From these quarters its tasks were openly prescribed for it. Thus the "*Temps*" writes in its editorial of May 18:

"But it is noteworthy that he (Azana) yesterday assembled for the purposes of joint consultation the president of the Cortes, Mr. Martinez Barrio; the head of the Republican Union, the former premier Giral; the leader of the republican lefts; the leader of the moderate socialists, Indalecio Prieto; Mr. Ramon Lamonedá; the representative of the leadership of the SP; and Mr. Jose Diaz, the general secretary of the CP. It would be too early to conclude that the orientation in Valencia is toward a more moderate government determined to free itself finally from the con-

trol of anarcho-syndicalists. But this is an attempt which, in the end, will have to be made, no matter what the resistance of the extremists may be, if the collapse of the republican state power sooner or later is to be avoided."

From these words, the essence and aims of the new Valencia government emerge clearly. It is supposed to clean up the forces fighting for proletarian revolution, to disarm them, to destroy and annihilate them. It is supposed to create a firm basis, from a military and police standpoint, for a bourgeois restoration. These are the objectives but, in reality, the perspectives of such a government go far beyond what these people themselves understand or desire today. If this government continues to pursue its aims consistently, it must in the end undermine the foundations of its own existence, particularly, of the socialist and communist parties. For, in order to destroy the revolutionary elements of the working class in Catalonia and the rest of Spain, it will have to base itself more and more upon the powers of reaction and to apply constantly more reactionary measures—as is clearly pointed out in the declaration of Caballero's paper cited above. It is enough to refer to the example of German Social-Democracy, to Ebert-Scheidemann-Noske, who, in order to smash the Spartacus League, had to rely on the military and White Guardist organizations. It is clear, furthermore, that were this government to succeed in realizing its objectives, the prerequisites for a compromise with the military-fascist insurgents would be created—something towards which the

English and French governments have been working quite openly. This is a road that can end only in the collapse of the bourgeois-democratic republic—in the defeat of the struggle against the military-fascists at the front.

But there is by no means any guarantee that the new government and the forces behind it will succeed in realizing their objectives. The counter-current in the Spanish working class has already begun; this can be seen from the appeals of the CNT-FAI as well as from the attitude of the UGT leadership. To assure the victory of the forces of proletarian revolution it is absolutely necessary to create a firm alliance of all forces working in this direction and to develop a really communist leadership supported by the majority of the Spanish working class. For such a leadership we must turn in the first place to the POUM but also to certain elements among the anarcho-syndicalists and the SP lefts.

It is of the greatest significance that the five thousand men of the Assault Guards sent by Valencia to Barcelona to “restore order,” have fallen under the influence of the revolutionary sentiment of the Catalanian workers, that the POUM is gaining in popularity among the workers and that the virtual abolition of Catalanian autonomy has created bad blood even amongst certain petty bourgeois elements. As a whole, however, it must be said that the development of a revolutionary front fighting in the direction of proletarian power will be a long and difficult process. But it is the only road!

The POUM's Program For the Present Crisis

WE present below, as the best expression of a genuinely revolutionary course for Spain, the thirteen-point “program for the crisis” outlined by the POUM. This program appeared in the April 21, 1937, issue of “The Spanish Revolution,” English-language bulletin of the POUM, and was proposed as the way out of the deep political crisis in which Catalonia and all Spain found itself.

* * *

1. Socialization of heavy industry and transport.
2. Nationalization of banking.
3. Municipalization of real estate.
4. Building of an army controlled by the working class.
5. Constitution of a single Interior Security Corps, based on the Guard Patrols and the Investigation Corps, created by the revolution and incorporating the old police organizations that have demonstrated their loyalty to the working class.
6. Immediate offensive on the Aragon front.
7. Reduction of high salaries.
8. Monopoly of foreign trade.
9. Creation of a powerful war industry, socialized and rigorously centralized.
10. Nationalization of the land, insuring the product to those who work it and granting them the necessary credits. Collective cultivation of

large estates and economic aid for those collective farms created during the course of the revolution which have demonstrated their vitality.

11. Implacable fight against monopolists and profiteers by means of a rigorous direct control of the distribution and price of food-stuffs.
12. Rapid and efficient organization of aerial and naval defense of all our territory.
13. Convocation of a congress of delegates of workers' and peasants' unions and soldiers to lay the fundamental bases of the new regime and from which would arise a workers' and peasants' government—a government which would be the most democratic possible, which would express unequivocally the will of the great majority of the people, and which would have complete authority to ensure the new revolutionary order.

THE INTERNATIONAL CLASS STRUGGLE

*Organ of the International Communist
Opposition*

A quarterly publication of labor
political theory and practice.

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Annual Subscription at \$1.00

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